Letter from William Goodell

(~~In the Liberator~~)

New York. Oct 3. 1853.

To Messrs Samuel May Jr,
Francis Jackson, R. F. Wallcutt, and
the Managers of the Massachusetts
Anti Slavery Society.

Gentlemen — On returning from the country I find the Liberator of Sept 2. containing your response to my demand in that paper of July 29th.

One of the strongest and most valuable attestations ~~which~~ that any book of History can receive is the unconscious and unintentional testimony of those who find fault with it, who charge upon it "mis-statements" and "errors" declaring it to be "untrue and untrustworthy" — yet who, nevertheless, upon being called upon to "substantiate or retract" those charges, decline, on mature deliberation, to do so, or even to bring forward any definite specifications of them. — This invaluable testimony, gentlemen, you have furnished me, and I now tender to you, publickly, through the Liberator, my grateful acknowledgments for so important a service. The numbers of the Liberator for July 15th in which those charges of yours first appeared, ~~of~~ for July 29th in which I demanded proof or retraction, and ~~of~~ for Sept 2d in which those general charges are repeated without either proof or specification, will be preserved by me with the utmost care, as containing your own tacit but unwilling acknowledgment that my statements cannot be impeached.

I ought also to honor your sound discretion in not venturing to re-echo the frivolous and absurd specifications of Oliver Johnson, in the Pennsylvania Freeman, which are noticed in the Appendix to my second edition.

Impartial readers of my book will see that I have not written as a partizan (in a controversy in which I never enlisted) nor with any view to disparage your Society, nor to build up its rival — that, while dissenting from the position and policy of both, and pointing out what I conceived to be their defects, I

have given cheerful and ample credit to both for their important labors — at the same time showing, as a full history of anti-slavery efforts must needs do, that since the division of 1840, a very great portion of the Anti Slavery labor of the Country (political, ecclesiastical, and moral) has been conducted outside of either of these National Societies, and without their co-operation. Such an impartial history must, of necessity, expose the exclusive claims of your society and its affiliated bodies, and their unsparing denunciations of all anti-slavery efforts and organizations except their own. If this be the real "head and front of my offending", be it so. Let the public and let posterity judge between us.

Your allusion to William Harned is a mistaken one, and conveys an erroneous impression. My History was published with my own funds, on my own account. William Harned (not an enemy of your Society) was then selling books on his own responsibility, as Daniel Foster has been doing. He was willing to sell my book on Commission, and, for convenience, he lent me his name on the title page of that edition, as is customary when a publishing author has no business place of his own in the City. In this he did not act as "Agent of the American & Foreign Anti Slavery Society", nor of its Committee, who were never consulted in the matter, and whose endorsement of my book, if I had sought it, could not have been obtained. One, at least, of its leading members thinks the book unjust to their Society, and another of them characterizes certain pages of it (concerning the Federal Union) as "rank Garrisonism". — Yet neither of them went so far as to forbid Mr. Harned to sell it, while in their employ, as you, gentlemen, forbade Mr. Foster. Do not understand me as bringing any personal complaint against you. You had a ~~perfect~~ right to be as intolerant as you pleased, and the public have a right to notice the fact. I do not fear any scrutiny of my book. If you wish to continue your exclusive

claims to all the genuine abolitionism of the country, you do well to suppress, so far as you can, the information my book contains. But I think you mistake your true course, and the demands of the age.

So long as the zealous participants in the controversy and division of 1840, on both sides, continue to find fault, as they now do, with my account of it, each thinking me too commendatory of their opponents, so long I shall be encouraged to think that my earnest and pains-taking effort to be impartial, has succeeded, and that my book (as Gerrit Smith has said of it) "does justice to all, injustice to none".

Wishing you great success and honor, in your earnest and ~~persevering~~ persevering labors against Slavery, I am, gentlemen, your sincere friend, laboring in the same cause.

William Goodell